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Department of Medical Genetics

April 27, 1957

Dr. David Goddard
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University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia 4, Pa.

Dear Dave:

I don't know how to thank you for your good offices in my nomination to the Academy. The trappings don't mean a great deal to me; the warm appreciations from my friends do, very much.

While I am told that the Academy has become more of a venerable honorary society and less of a working organization, it is still the official channel of scientific advice to the U. S. Government, and I look with great seriousness on the business side of its activity. This has some bearing on my choice of section, and frankly I would like to have your advice on it.

First of all, it is quite clear where my friends are. I looked over the list of the Botany section, and was pleased to see how close I was to so many of its members. By the same token, this means that I could add very little inspiration to its deliberations, that my own ideas are likely to be represented many times over, and this would apply even to potential nominees for membership, as well as to other possible areas of deliberation. Still, the orientation of this section is the closest to my own basic research interest.

On the other hand, I have been resuscitating my early interest in medicine as the background of scientific specialization, and the medical school here has been sponsoring a program where genetics may have a unique opportunity for an impact on medical education and research. This forebodes no change at all in my own line of research activity, but it is the direction of what you might call my administrative interests. For this reason, I have been speculating about joining the Pathology & Bacteriology section instead. Now I have no idea how welcome I am likely to be there, being personally acquainted with only a handful of its members. I may prove to be too isolated there to be of any use at all. But I did wonder if this did not also mean that I might be able to add something to the context of that section, which they might otherwise lack.

Now if Academy membership means just honorific recognition, it would be better to join with a congenial group of friends. If there is more to do, then the considerations of the previous paragraph would have more weight. I am frankly in a quandary, and would be glad to have your reactions.

With best regards,

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg